

# **Defendant's Exhibit 597**



## Mona Lisa

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# Mona Lisa

painting by Leonardo da Vinci

Alternate titles: "*La Gioconda*", "*La Joconde*", "*Portrait of Lisa Gherardini, wife of Francesco del Giocondo*"By The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica • [Article History](#)

## Top Questions

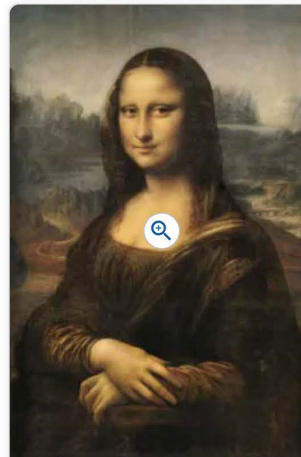
Who was the Mona Lisa in real life? ▾

How many years did it take to paint the *Mona Lisa*? ▾Where is the real *Mona Lisa* kept? ▾What is the value of the *Mona Lisa*? ▾Why is the *Mona Lisa* so famous? ▾

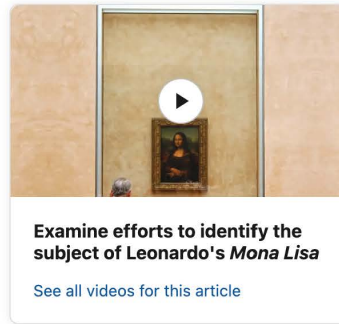
**Mona Lisa**, also called **Portrait of Lisa Gherardini, wife of Francesco del Giocondo**, Italian **La Gioconda**, or French **La Joconde**, oil painting on a poplar wood panel by **Leonardo da Vinci**, probably the world's most famous painting. It was painted sometime between 1503 and 1519, when Leonardo was living in **Florence**, and it now hangs in the **Louvre Museum**, **Paris**, where it remained an object of pilgrimage in the 21st century. The sitter's mysterious smile and her unproven identity have made the painting a source of ongoing investigation and fascination.

## Subject

The painting presents a woman in half-body portrait, which has as a backdrop a distant landscape. Yet this simple description of a seemingly standard [composition](#) gives little sense of Leonardo's achievement. The three-quarter view, in which the sitter's position mostly turns toward the viewer, broke from the standard profile pose used in Italian art and quickly became the convention for all portraits, one used well into the 21st century. The subject's softly sculptural face shows Leonardo's skillful handling of [sfumato](#) (use of fine shading) and reveals his understanding of the musculature and the skull beneath the skin. The delicately painted veil, the finely wrought tresses, and the careful rendering of folded fabric demonstrate Leonardo's studied observations and inexhaustible patience. Moreover, the sensuous curves of the sitter's hair and clothing are echoed in the shapes of the valleys and rivers behind her. The sense of overall harmony achieved in the painting—especially apparent in the sitter's faint smile—reflects Leonardo's idea of the cosmic link connecting humanity and nature, making this painting an enduring record of Leonardo's vision. In its [exquisite](#) synthesis of sitter and landscape, the *Mona Lisa* set the standard for all future portraits.

Leonardo da Vinci: *Mona Lisa*Leonardo da Vinci: *Mona Lisa*[See all videos for this article](#)

There has been much speculation and debate regarding the identity of the portrait's sitter. Scholars and historians have posited numerous interpretations, including that she is Lisa del Giocondo (née Gherardini), the wife of the Florentine merchant Francesco di Bartolomeo del Giocondo, hence the [alternative](#) title to the work, *La Gioconda*. That identity was first suggested in 1550 by artist biographer [Giorgio Vasari](#).



Another theory was that the model may have been Leonardo's mother, Caterina. That interpretation was put forth by, among others, [Sigmund Freud](#), who seemed to think that the Mona Lisa's mysterious smile emerged from a—perhaps unconscious—memory of Caterina's smile. A third suggestion was that the painting was, in fact, Leonardo's self-portrait, given the resemblance between the sitter's and the artist's facial features. Some scholars suggested that disguising himself as a woman was the artist's riddle. The sitter's identity has not been definitively proven. Numerous attempts in the 21st century to settle the debate by seeking Lisa del Giocondo's remains to test her DNA and recreate an image of her face were inconclusive.

## History

Leonardo da Vinci began painting the *Mona Lisa* about 1503, and it was in his studio when he died in 1519. He likely worked on it intermittently over several years, adding multiple layers of thin oil glazes at different times. Small cracks in the paint, called craquelure, appear throughout the whole piece, but they are finer on the hands, where the thinner glazes correspond to Leonardo's late period.

[Britannica Quiz](#) [Name that Painter!](#)

French King [Francis I](#), in whose court Leonardo spent the last years of his life, [acquired](#) the work after the artist's death, and it became part of the royal collection. For centuries the portrait was secluded in French palaces, until insurgents claimed the royal collection as the property of the people during the [French Revolution](#) (1787–99). Following a period hanging in [Napoleon's](#) bedroom, the *Mona Lisa* was installed in the [Louvre Museum](#) at the turn of the 19th century.

In 1911 the painting was stolen, causing an immediate media sensation. People flocked to the Louvre to view the empty space where the painting had once hung, the museum's director of paintings resigned, and the poet [Guillaume Apollinaire](#) and artist [Pablo Picasso](#) were even arrested as suspects. Two years later an art dealer in [Florence](#) alerted local authorities that a man had tried to sell him the painting. Police found the portrait stashed in the false bottom of a trunk belonging to Vincenzo Peruggia, an Italian immigrant who had briefly worked at the Louvre fitting glass on a selection of paintings, including the *Mona Lisa*. He and possibly two other workers had hidden in a closet overnight, taken the portrait from the wall the morning of August 21, 1911, and run off without [suspicion](#). Peruggia was arrested, tried, and imprisoned, while the *Mona Lisa* took a tour of Italy before making its triumphant return to France.

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During [World War II](#) the *Mona Lisa*, singled out as the most-endangered artwork in the Louvre, was evacuated to various locations in France's countryside, returning to the museum in 1945 after peace had been declared. It later traveled to the [United States](#) in 1963, drawing about 40,000 people per day during its six-week stay at the [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) in [New York City](#) and at the [National](#)

## Condition

Scholars have noted that the *Mona Lisa* is in fairly good condition for its age. The poplar panel shows some evidence of [warping](#) from resistance to its original frame and to braces added by early restorers. To prevent the widening of a small crack, visible near the centre of the upper edge of the painting, dovetails were added to the back of the painting. Restorers later pasted heavy canvas over the crack and replaced the top dovetail.

The glass protecting the *Mona Lisa* was replaced with a bulletproof case after several attacks in 1956, one of which damaged an area near the subject's left elbow. The *Mona Lisa* thus escaped harm from acts of vandalism in 1974 during the work's visit to Tokyo and in 2009 when a museumgoer threw a ceramic mug at it.

## The *Mona Lisa* and its influence

The influence of the *Mona Lisa* on the [Renaissance](#) and later times has been enormous, revolutionizing contemporary [portrait painting](#). Not only did the three-quarter pose become the standard, but also Leonardo's preliminary drawings encouraged other artists to make more and freer studies for their paintings and stimulated [connoisseurs](#) to collect those drawings. Through the drawings, his Milanese works were made known to the Florentines. Also, his reputation and stature as an artist and thinker spread to his fellow artists and assured for them a freedom of action and thought similar to his own. One such painter was the young [Raphael](#), who sketched Leonardo's work in progress and adopted the *Mona Lisa* format for his portraits; it served as a clear model for his *Portrait of Maddalena Doni* (c. 1506).

Leonardo even influenced the fashion in which artists dressed their subjects. In his *Treatise on Painting*, published long after his death, he wrote that art should avoid the fashion:

*As far as possible avoid the costumes of your own day....Costumes of our period should not be depicted unless it be on tombstones, so that we may be spared being laughed at by our successors for the mad fashions of men and leave behind only things that may be admired for their dignity and beauty.*

The *Mona Lisa* demonstrates this aspect of his [treatise](#) perfectly in that La Gioconda is dressed in a coloured shift, loosely pleated at the neck, instead of the tight clothes that were then popular.

## Other *Mona Lisas*

At least a dozen excellent replicas of the *Mona Lisa* exist, many of them by Leonardo's students. One such copy at the [Prado Museum](#) in Madrid was thought to have been painted years after the original. However, during restoration of the painting in the early 2010s, which included using infrared reflectology to examine the work beneath the surface, conservators discovered that the painting had changes that mirrored those of the original. The findings suggested that the artist—likely one of the master's assistants—painted the copy as Leonardo worked on the *Mona Lisa* in his studio. Thus, the Prado version became the only known copy completed during Leonardo's lifetime. Conservators cleaned the entire painting and removed its black background, revealing a detailed landscape resembling Leonardo's version and vibrant colours, possibly evoking those of the original before the [varnish](#) applied by early restorers darkened over time.

Other copies of the *Mona Lisa* include the so-called *Isleworth Mona Lisa*, which some commentators asserted was Leonardo's first version of the famed portrait. The claim was a controversial one, with several leading Leonardo scholars flatly denying it. Numerous seminude interpretations, often referred to as *Monna Vanna*, also exist and were likely completed by Leonardo's students with occasional input from their master. The proliferation of *Mona Lisas* reflects, at



least in part, the subject's almost immediate embodiment of the ideal woman—beautiful, [enigmatic](#), receptive, and still just out of reach.

Over the centuries, this quintessential woman has taken on a new life in popular [culture](#). In the 20th century alone, her [iconic](#) status was mocked in schoolboy fashion—the addition of a mustache and goatee to a postcard reproduction—in [Marcel Duchamp](#)'s readymade *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919). His irreverent defacing of this best known of iconic paintings expressed the [Dadaists'](#) rejection of the art of the past, which in their eyes was part of the infamy of a civilization that had produced the horrors of the [First World War](#) just ended. [Andy Warhol](#) too took aim at the painting's status, in such serigraphs as *Thirty Are Better than One* (1963).

## ***Mona Lisa* off the wall**

References in the [visual arts](#) have been complemented by musical examinations. La Gioconda's personality and quirks were examined in a 1915 [opera](#) by Max von Schillings. Leonardo's portrait is also the inspiration for the classic song "[Mona Lisa](#)" by American lyricist Ray Evans and songwriter Jay Harold Livingston:

Mona Lisa, Mona Lisa  
Men have named you  
You're so like the lady with the mystic smile  
Is it only 'cause you're lonely  
They have blamed you  
For that Mona Lisa strangeness in your smile

Do you smile to tempt a lover, Mona Lisa  
Or is this your way to hide a broken heart  
Many dreams have been brought to your doorstep  
They just lie there, and they die there  
Are you warm, are you real, Mona Lisa  
Or just a cold and lonely, lovely work of art

It was famously recorded in 1950 by the jazz pianist and vocalist [Nat King Cole](#) and later by his daughter [Natalie](#), as well as many others.

There have been films, notably *Mona Lisa* (1986), and several novels, including [William Gibson's](#) [cyberpunk](#) *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988) and Canadian novelist Rachel Wyatt's *Mona Lisa Smiled a Little* (1999), linked to the painting. The Argentine writer Martín Caparrós's novel *Valfierno* (2004) brings to life the man who masterminded the 1911 theft of the *Mona Lisa* from the [Louvre](#).

Both fine art and [kitsch](#) continue to refer to Leonardo's portrait. Bath towels, [tapestries](#), [umbrellas](#), and many other household items bear her image, and that image is reproduced using everything from train tickets to rice plants. Five centuries after its creation, the *Mona Lisa* remains a touchstone for people around the world.

*The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica*

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